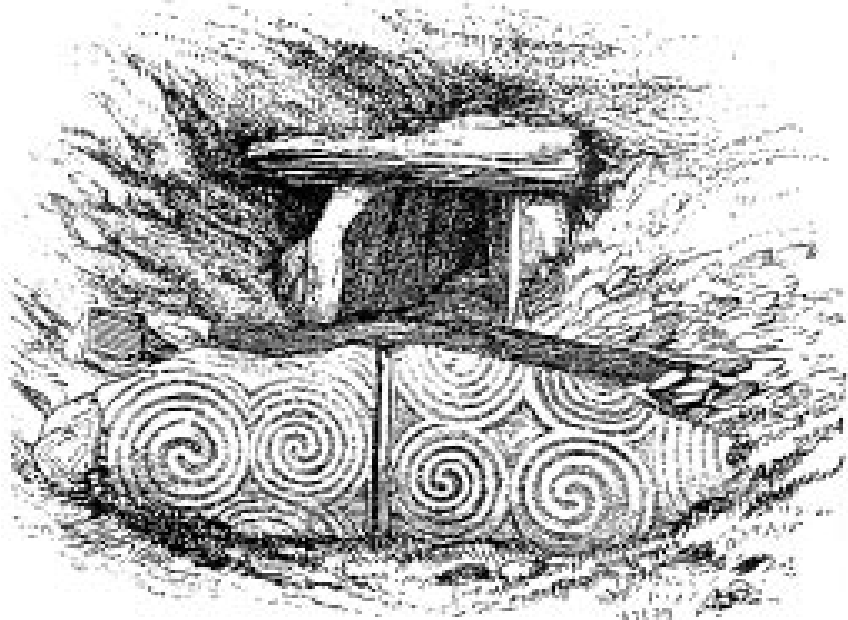


# ALBAN ARTHIAN



THE WINTER SOLSTICE  
CEREMONY OF  
THE ORDER OF BARDS  
OVATES & DRUIDS



## ALBAN ARTHAN THE WINTER SOLSTICE

21/22 DECEMBER NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

21/22 JUNE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

*Born is the Sun God as a dependent infant - who in some mysterious way has managed to escape the powers of darkness seeking to destroy him while he was still in the cradle of Winter. The survival of light through Winter was symbolised by one tiny hair on the young child's head. As the birth of the sun took place in Capricorn, the child was often represented as being suckled by a goat.*

### **Nuinn**

The Winter Solstice ceremony of the Druid tradition is known as Alban Arthan - which can be poetically translated as 'The Light of Arthur'. Here Arthur is equated with the Sun-God who dies and is reborn as the Celtic 'Son of Light' - the Mabon - at the Winter Solstice. It is Arthur who will be reborn -awakening from his slumbers in a secret cave in the Welsh mountains, to return as saviour of the British Isles.

The name of the ceremony, therefore, encapsulates or epitomizes the essential theme of this rite. During the ceremony the apparent death of the sun is mourned, and then as the fire is lit at the actual or symbolic time of the Solstice, the rebirth of the Sun, and by association, the return of Arthur, is celebrated.

This is an old act indeed. The Christian nativity story is but a recent version of the theme of the Sun's rebirth. It was only in 273 CE that the Church officially fixed the birthday of Jesus at the time of midwinter - his birthday is not dated in the gospels. But it is fitting that they made this choice - for Christ is the Sun-God of the Piscean Age, and his birth should therefore be at the time of the Winter Solstice.

The Sun-God Mithras, of the Taurean Age, was also born at the time of shortest light and maximum darkness, and it is at this time that the mystery of death and resurrection or rebirth is acted out symbolically by the very planets themselves.

The ceremony of Alban Arthan belongs traditionally to an open-air setting, and particularly to any site with orientations towards the sun-set and sun-rise of the Winter Solstice sun. The rebirth of light was a main preoccupation of pre-2000BC man - New Grange in Ireland was built so that the rising midwinter sun passed along the upper gallery of the approach passage-way and penetrated right into the centre chamber. From Parliament Hill, three sites point in a row to the Winter sun's rebirth, and at Stonehenge the departing sun of winter sets through the SW trilithon, whilst the sun is reborn at the midwinter sunrise through the SE trilithon.

The symbolism of the Winter Solstice ceremony is deeper and older than that of summer. The traditional rite begins with the usual wishing of peace to all four corners of the Earth, followed by the purification and consecration of the circle with water and fire. Reverence to the male and female principles follows, and the ceremony is then officially proclaimed.

The traditional ceremony then continues with a questioning of the Ancient by the Mabon, the Young One. This dialogue is reminiscent of Samhuinn, in which the Ancient is similarly questioned. We can often find a clue to the depth and significance of a ritual if we find similar themes in other cultures and spiritual traditions. This shows that the themes are of universal significance and do not simply derive from superficial or purely social strata of consciousness. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the dialogue between the young, unknowing one and the wise old person exists not only in certain Druid rituals, but also in the Jewish tradition. At the family Pesach table, the youngest son asks "Father, why is tonight different from all other nights?" Compare this with "Teach us, wise Ancient, to what period of time we have come." And, of course, the theme of the dying Sun-God reborn at the Winter Solstice can be found in many cultures and religious systems.

3

The dialogue continues with the Ancient pointing to the symbolic relationship between the Mabon and the Sun himself: "We show to you, young One, the birth of the youngest one, who bears your name, who is born in silence and weakness as the smallest of lights."

The ceremony is plunged into darkness. This putting out of the lights is the blackening and putting out of human faculties in the sacrifice of the dark, which corresponds to the alchemic blackening, just as the star about to be mentioned is the alchemic white stone. The companions then remove the black scraps of mourning that were attached to their robes. At the place of the solstice sunrise the lantern is lit and raised up by the Rose-bearer, who proclaims: "A star is lit in the place of the rose."

The lighting of all other lights from the one light which then follows, symbolises the reality of the One Source of all Life, Light and Love - from which all of us are kindled. The mistletoe is then brought from the North, place of perpetual darkness and growth, to the centre - it being the essence of this season. Dedicated by the double pentagram, it becomes the symbol of the holy instant. It is equated with life through its similar appearance to male sperm. Joined with the oak, sacred tree of eternity, the plant now carries both currents - of eternity and of the instant, and so it is cut with the golden sickle of sun and moon, and given to everyone present as the All-heal - the gift of the healing moment of eternity.

The whole ceremony is of a moment of time, the turning between the year's darkness and its new light - the time of nadir and rebirth. It thus marks both a beginning and a completion.

## THE RETURN OF THE SUN

The seed of light is born in the dark womb of midwinter, the time we know as the Winter Solstice. Solstice means 'standstill, ' for every year, on or around December 21<sup>st</sup> in the Northern hemisphere, June 21<sup>st</sup> in the Southern hemisphere, the sun appears to rise and set in the same place for a few days. It is the time of the longest night, when Earth's very breath seems to falter in the face of the overpowering dark. Then, barely noticeable at first, the sun begins its long journey towards the opposite pole, and all of creation begins to exhale. A cycle of new life can begin once again.

The druids of the 18th century Welsh Revival called this festival Alban Arthan, from an old literary translation of the word for 'arctic': literally 'bear-place,' a term that also makes us think of the constellation of the Great Bear, which shines so brightly in the skies of the Northern Hemisphere every winter. It also puts us in mind of Arthur, the wonder-child whose birth meant the beginning of a Golden Age for Britain.

From the dawn of time, human beings have hailed the return of the Sun as an occasion of the highest significance: the promise of the continuation of life on earth. One ancient temple that still stands as a memorial to the importance of the solstice to the proto-druids of the New Stone Age is the Brugh na Bóinne (the hostel of the River Boyne) in County Meath, Ireland, which today we call New Grange. The largest circular earth-chamber in Europe, it is perhaps the most mysterious and awe-inspiring Neolithic monument in Ireland, believed to be over 5,000 years old. Originally it was covered with chunks of white quartz and must have looked like a huge gleaming white egg against the green meadows of the Boyne Valley. In front of its entrance lies an enormous pillar of stone, carved all over with spirals. This stone acts as a sacred threshold of the temple, which can only be entered through a narrow passageway. To leave the outside world and walk, half-stooping, down this path is to journey into the vagina of the Earth Mother, and it eventually opens up into a womb-shaped round space with chambers off to the sides, some of which held ritual artefacts. Here, every Winter Solstice since the temple was built over 5,000 years ago, a miracle occurs: the first rays of the newly-risen sun shoot down a special passageway built above the entrance-way and impregnate earth's womb with light. The Sun God mates with the Goddess of the Land to conceive new light.

Although archaeologists believe the temple was in ruins during the time of the Celts, Irish mythology suggests that the Celtic druids would have been well aware of its significance. In some tales, it was built by the Dagda, the Great God, who was associated with the sun. It was also the home of the goddess, Boand, who gave her name to the nearby Boyne River. The lustful Dagda tricked Boand's husband, Elcmar, by sending him away on an errand, then lying with his beautiful wife. Elcmar was to return by nightfall, but the Dagda caused the sun to stand still for nine months, at which point Boand gave birth to a child, Angus Óg. In this story, Boand is of course the goddess of the land, the Dagda is the old Sun and Angus is the young son/Sun who is born of their union. At New Grange, we can imagine how long ago shamans, proto-druids and other walkers-between-the-worlds would have braved the spiral threshold every winter to sit in the pitch dark interior, where the dead were also buried, perhaps fasting, chanting and drumming, awaiting the miracle that would occur on the morning of the new sun's birth.

In later years, the birth of the Sun was conflated with the birth of the Son of Mary: Jesus Christ. In pre-Christian times, all of Europe from Scandinavia to Italy celebrated this time of the year with feasting, dancing and merrymaking – and above all, light and fire. The classical Romans held a joyful and often rowdy feast known as the Saturnalia, and by the second century CE, they also celebrated the 'Birthday of the Unconquered Sun' on December 25th, a custom that originated with Mithraism. Further north, the Norse celebrated 'Yule' - a name which could mean 'wheel', or which possibly gives us the root word for 'jolly'.

By the fourth century C.E., the Roman Catholic Church pronounced December 25th the official birthday of Jesus of Nazareth, and that it would henceforth be celebrated as the Feast of Christ, (Christ's Mass, or Christmas). The actual birthday of Christ had never been certain, so after much debate, the ancient midwinter feast was chosen because people were used to celebrating the birth of a Sun-god/hero at this time of year. Even then, the Church fathers had to continually remind believers that they were supposed to be worshipping the birth of Christ, not the Sun. For although this holiday now had a new name, many of the same customs were carried on as they had been for thousands of years, and for the same reason: to banish the dark and welcome back the light.

Up until quite recently, people in the British Isles and Ireland celebrated this festival for almost two weeks, with peaks at December 25th, January 1st, and January 6th, giving rise to the famous 'Twelve Days of Christmas.' For many poor people, there was no work to be had at this season anyway, so it was a time when they dressed up as the spirits of gods gone by: wearing animal masks and assorted costumes, they brought in the spirit of mirth through 'guising' (dressing up) and 'mumming' (acting traditional plays) through the villages, and especially into the halls of the rich, who would give them food and drink in return. Our modern custom of carol singing around the neighbourhood, collecting for charity, stems from this ancient tradition.

Both rich and poor decorated their houses with evergreen boughs, especially holly, whose bright berries symbolize warmth and life. Candles were also popular everywhere, bringing welcome light into dark, cold dwellings. In pre-Christian times, these would probably have been blazing torches, but in later centuries people used candles that were usually coloured white or red. A family might have one large individual candle or a number of smaller ones so that each member of the family, including the children, could light their own. In more recent times in Ireland, those who could afford it had a candle that would last a whole week, called the *coinneal mór na Nollaig*, the Great Candle of Christmas, that was set burning on the front windowsill to welcome the weary traveller.

Unlike the festivals of the warmer months, there were no huge bonfires out of doors. Instead, households gathered around an enormous blazing hearth-fire. Groups of people went into the forest to fetch home the biggest log or stump of wood they could find: this was called the Yule Log in Scotland, or *Y Bloccyn Gwyliau*, the Festival Block, in Wales. It had to be big enough to provide heat and light for the whole twelve days. The log was decorated with long sprays of ivy and other greenery, and placed upon a piece of last year's wood, which was used for kindling the new one, symbolizing the continuity of light and life. Then a libation of cider or ale was poured over it before it was set alight and the whole household sat around it eating and drinking, sharing stories, riddles and songs, warming themselves at the merry blaze that symbolized the sun's light brought down into the human domain.

For further information about this time, see *The Winter Solstice* by John Matthews Godsfield Press 1998.



## LIVING THE WHEEL OF THE YEAR

If you are unable to attend the celebration of Alban Arthan in a Grove, you may want to celebrate this festival on your own or with friends. The way you do this is up to you, but remember that the essential features of Alban Arthan are the mourning and letting go of that which is finishing and dying, a period of inner darkness, and then the recognition of the reality of rebirth within the soul. The importance of the mourning aspect lies in the fact that rebirth can only really occur (at whatever level) once we have fully mourned or recognised the passing of the old. Once we have done this, we can then let go and open ourselves to the new dawn.

6 The whole period of two weeks or so from the Solstice through until the New Year and the passing of Twelfth Night on 6th January, is unique in the whole year. The upheaval of the holidays and celebrations at this time can place a great deal of stress on many of us. The disruption of the normal routine, the enforced jollity and socialisations that occur, can sometimes evoke the 'shadow' of this gregariousness, in a feeling of depression and a sense of isolation. If we remember that this time is one in which we are indeed furthest from the sun, while allowing ourselves to be aware of the birth of the Mabon or Sun-Child within our hearts, we can try to retain this small light within us, even though it may still be difficult, dark and cold outside. Alban Arthan may be a very quiet and important time for us, in which in the silent, dark depths of our being we contact the spark of the new Sun-Child that will grow into a shining child of light as the year progresses.

The fact that Alban Arthan is celebrated four days before Christmas can sometimes be of great help when a child needs to spend some festive time with two separated parents. Rather than competing for the one day of Christmas, both parents can offer the child a festive day: one at the Alban, the other on Christmas day.

*If you're not planning a ceremony as such, or in addition to your celebration, here are some suggestions for things you can do to acknowledge and attune to the energy of the time*

## ASSOCIATIONS TO ALBAN ARTHAN THE SUN, EARTH, GREEN, MISTLETOE, MIDNIGHT, THE GREAT BEAR, THE NIGHT SKY, DEATH, REBIRTH

On the longest night, go through the house and turn out all the lights, and spend some time feeling the darkness. Then light a single candle, and take it around your house from room to room, re-lighting candles in each room.

Go to bed early with a seed catalogue.

Decorate your altar with mistletoe.

Drink mead in celebration of the rebirth of the year. Treat this time as the ending of the year, and look forward to the year that is beginning by daydreaming, then planning your coming year.

Travel by tube (underground train); eat the fruit cake/fruit gin you made at Alban Elfed; plant garlic; visit a cemetery; see where the sun enters or leaves your house/flat.

Take two advent candles. Cut a few days off one. Light it on the solstice. Start lighting the second one around 12<sup>th</sup> night. That will last you till Imbolc!

Dance or movement meditation: Start lying flat on your back. Slowly wake up, get up, and begin moving to some joyous music.



# ALBAN ARTHAN SOLO CEREMONY

*Prepare a central candle (lit) and a candle (unlit) in each Quarter. Have a lighter or matches at the centre as well as your spiritual journal or a notebook and pen. Wear a light coloured robe or clothing, with a dark cloak or shawl covering. This ceremony needs to be done at night in as dark a place as possible.*

## THE OPENING

*Enter your circle from the West. On entering, pause for several breaths, consciously leaving your daily concerns aside, allowing yourself to relax. Feel the earth beneath you and the sky above you, feel yourself grounded and centred. Sitting if necessary, perform the Light Body exercise. If you wish, you can now visualise your Sacred Grove. This is a good time to chant a few AWENS to 'warm up' your voice. It also helps you to feel connected, centred and relaxed.*

*Move sunwise to the East, pause and make a salutation, such as*

*O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) (choose a term you feel comfortable with) , I ask for your blessings on this my ceremony of Alban Arthan (pause, then turn to face inward) O Spirit of this circle, Spirit of this place, I ask for your blessings, guidance and inspiration on this my ceremony.*

*Then complete the circuit and stand again in the West, facing inwards. Take a few moments to meditate on peace, and to feel peace within you. It may help to find an image that you associate with peace, which you can then use to help you awaken the feeling within yourself. Some examples are a quiet lake; a sphere of soft light; or a particular colour. If you are not very visual, you could try imagining a piece of music, or a musical note or chord, or simply the sound of the word 'peace' as you say it to yourself. Notice also how your body feels: let yourself breathe peace. If you like, you could say the Druid Prayer for Peace*

8

*Deep within the still centre of my being, may I find peace.  
Silently within the quiet of the grove, may I share peace.  
Gently within the greater circle of humankind,  
May I radiate peace.*

*Then walk to the North, face outward, and say  
May there be peace in the north.*

*As you do, imagine peace flowing out to the North – picture it as it flows through your neighbours' homes and gardens, out across roads and forests, across towns and cities, all the way across the Earth.*



*Then turn and cross the circle to the South (skirting round the central fire or candle if you have one) and repeat. Then to the West, then across again to the East. Then step toward the centre and turn around in a full circle, saying*

May there be peace throughout the whole world.

*Now return to the West, facing centre, and, if you choose, say the Druid's Prayer:*

Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,  
and in protection, strength,  
and in strength, understanding,  
and in understanding, knowledge,  
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,  
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,  
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,  
and in the love of all existences,  
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

*Chant more AWENS.*

*Then, moving around to start at the East, cast your circle as taught in Gwers Seven, trying to visualise it clearly as you do so. Perhaps you can hear it, or feel it, as well as see it. Notice that the circle creates a container: feel yourself to be contained. When you have completed the circle and are again standing in the East, face in to the centre and say:*

This is sacred time. This is sacred space. I am fully present, here and now.

*Now, if you have learnt how to do this, bless and consecrate your circle with Water and Fire, then stand at the East. (Leave out this stage if you have not yet learned how to do this). Then turn to face outwards, and raise one or both hands in salutation and say:*

With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, I call upon the powers of the East.

*See the clear blue sky above and ahead of you and feel the blessing of the dawn and of the hawk, and sense power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then turn and walk sunwise to the South, and facing outwards say*

With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, I call upon the powers of the South.

*See warm southern lands before you in the noon-day sun – sense the blessing of the stag and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the West, and facing outwards say*

With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, I call upon the powers of the West.

*See the sun setting over the sea or a lake – sense the blessing of the salmon, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction. Then walk sunwise to the North, and facing outwards say*

*With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, I call upon the powers of the North.*

*Gaze into a clear night sky – see the stars shining in the darkness, sense the blessings of the bear, and the Great Bear, and feel power flowing into your circle from this direction.*

*Then turn to face into the circle, and move your attention to the earth beneath you. Sense the energy of the earth flowing up into you, and the energy of the sky flowing down into you – meeting in the centre of your Being. Feeling connected to both Earth and Sky, say*

*May the harmony of my life and of this circle be complete.*

## THE RITE

*Then sit, facing the central candle, and meditate on this darkest time of the year. Slowly, with pauses to meditate, read, or say aloud, this Elegy (or make your own):*

Now is the time to acknowledge all that has gone before and is no more. The warm breezes of the high summer are a memory, I am far from that place and now I witness the darkest point.

The oak is bare, the earth is cold, the sky is black - from where could hope arise?

I am as far from the summer lands as ever I could be. It seems the very land around me is dead. The cold and the dark have grown strong. I mourn the passing of the bright days.

My eyes are wet with the tears of dreams lost to the dark. My inner vision is misted by grief. The world is spiralling in the darkness, lost to the light, with the sun veiled in a dark disguise.

*Now extinguish the candle (read through this guided meditation first!) and sit in the darkness. See if you can feel the darkness within yourself and in the world around you. Visualise the Earth and the Sun in space, the distance between them, their movement, the tilt of the Earth's axis away from the sun. Picture where you are sitting on the globe. Feel the power of the earth beneath you, the pull of her gravity, and, if it feels right, let yourself gently sink down into the deep dark Earth. Let yourself forget about time, about work, about your cares and concerns. The Earth is deep and dark, all enfolding, all-absorbing. It is deeply restful, just to lie within the earth. You don't have to do anything or make anything or change anything. Rest here as long as you like.... when the time is right, you will feel that the slow spin of the Earth is bringing you nearer to the light once again, and in the midst of the darkness you visualise, or sense, a tiny spark of light beginning to grow.*

*This light gently pulls you out of your meditation, and as you open your eyes, remove your dark cloak/shawl and stand up. Feel yourself reborn with the light, and willing to carry that light out into the dark world. Light the central candle again, saying*

The light is reborn on Earth as it is in my soul.

*Contemplate this single light, then when you're ready carry the candle sunwise to the East and light the candle there, saying*

I celebrate the birth of Mabon, the youngest one, who is born in silence and weakness as the smallest of lights.

*Then to the South, saying*

The new fire is with me in this circle of light. I proclaim the rebirth of the Sun, the symbol of Og (*or whatever solar principle or deity you wish to call on. Og is pronounced Oh-g*) the Supreme Principle in this the midnight of the year.

*Then to the West, saying*

I proclaim the creation of all things, the revolution of all that is past towards a new good. The child is born that grows into the great Og.

*Then back to the North, saying*

The great Og is in every Mabon. Yet every Og shall occlude and diminish. And every Og is reborn as a Mabon. Such is the circle of life.

*Then stand facing centre and chant 9 AWENS, then say*

May the power of this moment inspire me, here at the rebirth of the light. May the power of the one life sustain me. May the love of the one light pervade me. May my soul be strengthened thereby.

*Sit and record your experiences of the ritual in your journal or notebook, then enact*

## THE CLOSING

11

*Stand at the East facing the centre, and say*

It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down, may it be relit in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained. *Now extinguish the central candle. Alternatively you can say:* As the radiance of this ceremony fades let it remain as a light in my heart. May my memory hold what the eye and ear have gained.

*Chant AWENS. Then say*

May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

*Walk sunwise to the North, and facing outwards say*

In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, I thank the powers of the North.

*Then Walk counter-sunwise to the West, and facing outwards say*

In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water I thank the powers of the West.

*Then Walk counter-sunwise to the South, and facing outwards say*

In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, I thank the powers of the South.

*Then Walk counter-sunwise to the East, and facing outwards say*

In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, I thank the powers of the East.

*Turn to face the centre again, and pause to feel that the energies of each direction have ceased to flow into the circle. Then say*

May the harmony of the land be complete.

*Then uncast the circle counter-sunwise, return to the East and say*

May the blessings of the Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with me. I declare this ceremony of Alban Arthan is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within my being.

*Then make whatever closing salutations you wish to the East, and exit sunwise.*



# ALBAN ARTHAN GROUP CEREMONY

*ADDITIONAL ROLES – Elegist 1, Elegist 2, Mistletoe bearer, Oak bearer, Optional: Mabon (usually the youngest person present).*

*Traditionally takes place at night.*

*PREPARE: The ceremony requires some oak and mistletoe, or substitutes. Each participant should have their own candle lantern if outdoors, or night-light if indoors - lighting it forms part of the ceremony – and attire themselves with a ‘scrap of mourning’, for example a black cloth or ribbon that can be removed. Druid 1 needs a sickle or knife to cut the mistletoe.*

## THE OPENING

*Each person enters from the West and circles sunwise to salute the East before taking their place in the circle.*

**HERALD :** By the power of star and stone,  
By the power of the land within and without,  
By all that is Fair and Free,  
We welcome you to this rite of Alban Arthan  
In the grove/seed group/family/etc. of...

**WEST:** We have come from East and West, North and South to be here together today. *(All join hands)*

**DRUID 2:** Let us take three breaths .....  
Together with the Earth beneath us....  
Together with the Sky above us....  
Together with the Sea around us...

**NORTH:** With the blessings of Earth, Sea and Sky may our ceremony begin!  
*(All release hands)*

**DRUID 1:** (*Saluting East and facing outwards*) O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) (*Choose a term you feel comfortable with*) we greet you and honour you, and ask for your blessings! (*face inwards*) O Spirit of this place, O Spirit of this circle, we ask for your blessings, your guidance, and your inspiration on this our ceremony.

**DRUID 2:** Let us begin by giving peace to the quarters, for without peace can no work be.

(*Moving to salute each direction in turn, crossing the centre of the circle, then returning to place in the West*)

May there be Peace in the North.

May there be Peace in the South.

May there be Peace in the West.

May there be Peace in the East.

**ALL:** May there be peace throughout the whole world.

**DRUID 1:** Let us join in this prayer that unites all Druids:

**ALL:** Grant, O Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es), thy protection,  
and in protection, strength,  
and in strength, understanding,  
and in understanding, knowledge,  
and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,  
and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,  
and in the love of it, the love of all existences,  
and in the love of all existences,  
the love of Spirit/Great Spirit/God(s)/Goddess(es) and all goodness.

**ALL:** 3 AWENS

14 **DRUID 1:** Let all disturbing thoughts be laid aside. (*Casts circle sunwise, while Druid 2 says*)

**DRUID 2:** The circle of our horizon – of our lives and lands, of time and of the year, of seasons and of goodness, of birth and of growing, of dying and of rebirth....

*The circle can either be cast with a wand, staff, sword or forefinger, or in the following way (particularly if children are present - SOUTH: Let us mark out this circle with symbols of the season. (Children/adults sprinkle confetti or seeds, flowers, petals or leaves in circle sunwise around participants while Druid 2 speaks as above).*

**DRUID 2:** As this circle is cast, the enchantment of the apparent world subsides. We stand together in the eye of the sun/by the light of the stars, here and now, between past and future. The earth below us, the heavens above us, and the circle/stones/trees/sea around us. This is sacred time. This is sacred space.

**DRUID 1:** Now let us consecrate this circle with Water and with Fire.

**WEST or WATER BEARER:** May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Water. (*moves sunwise with water*)

**SOUTH or FIRE BEARER:** May our circle be purified and blessed with the Element of Fire. (*moves sunwise with candle/incense*)

**DRUID 1:** We gather as equals, in our physical form here upon the earth. Each presence is a blessing, and with every breath we take, we breathe light and life into this circle.

**DRUID 2:** Let the four directions be honoured, and let the gateways of the Quarters be opened, that power and radiance might enter our circle for the good of all beings.

**EAST** (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the hawk of dawn soaring in the clear pure air, we call upon the powers of the East.

**SOUTH** (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great stag in the heat of the chase, and the inner fire of the sun, we call upon the powers of the South.

**WEST** (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the salmon of wisdom who dwells within the sacred waters of the pool, we call upon the powers of the West.

**NORTH** (*turning and facing outwards*): With the blessing of the great bear of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth, we call upon the powers of the North.

*All four then turn to face into the circle.*

**ALL:** May the harmony of our circle be complete.

15

## THE RITE

**EAST:** I proclaim the festival of Alban Arthan - the Light of Arthur – at the Winter Solstice.

**WEST:** The turning point of the whole world.

**SOUTH:** The time of nadir and rebirth.

**NORTH:** I proclaim the time of greatest night.

**DRUID 1:** The Winter Solstice is marked throughout the whole world and belongs not to one area or one people, but stands for truth universal. As one we stand in this circle and attend the triumph of the dark. Now is the time to mourn that which is finishing and dying.

**ELEGIST 1:** Now is the time to acknowledge all that has gone before and is no more. The warm breezes of the high summer are a memory, we are far from that place and now we witness the darkest point.

**ELEGIST 2:** The oak is bare, the earth is cold, the sky is black - from where could hope arise?

**ELEGIST 1:** We are as far from the summer lands as ever we could be. It seems the very land around us is dead.

**ELEGIST 2:** The cold and the dark have grown strong. We mourn the passing of the bright days.

**ELEGIST 1:** Our eyes are wet with the tears of dreams lost to the dark. Our inner vision is misted by grief.

**ELEGIST 2:** The world is spiralling in the darkness, lost to the light, with the sun veiled in a dark disguise.

**DRUID 1:** Let us extinguish all lights and meditate (*DRUIDS 1 and 2 may wish to keep their lanterns or tiny pencil torches lit in order to read the next section to lead the meditation.*) We stand at the centre of a mysterious universe. Let the silence enfold us as we take a moment to feel the power of this place... the power of the circle around us..., the track of the sun around the earth..., the pulse of the earth beneath us..... the power of life and of death....(*pause*)

16

**DRUID 2:** Let the darkness be felt with our minds and our hearts. Only out of darkness does light arise... Only when we have mourned the passing of the old can rebirth occur... We know well that there will be a new dawn tomorrow, after this the longest of nights. Yet often we forget this simple truth. When we let go of our longing for the past, we are free to nurture the still small light of hope in our hearts.

*Pause*

**DRUID 1:** Cast away whatever impedes the appearance of light. *Participants remove their mourning scraps.*



.....  
*If outdoors with lanterns, consider the following format:*

**FIRE BEARER** *lights East lantern.* **EAST:** A flame is lit in the depths of our souls.

**FIRE BEARER** *lights South lantern.* **SOUTH:** The new fire is with us in this circle of light. I proclaim the rebirth of the Sun, the Mabon, the youngest one, who from the womb of the Great Mother is born in silence and weakness as the smallest of lights, in this the midnight of the year.

**FIRE BEARER** *lights West lantern.* **WEST:** I proclaim the creation of all things, the revolution of all that is past towards a new good. The child is born that grows into the great Sun-God Og (*pronounced Oh-g*)

**FIRE BEARER** *lights North lantern.* **NORTH:** The great Og is in every Mabon. Yet every Og shall occlude and diminish. And every Og is reborn as a Mabon. Such is the circle of life.

*All participants now light their candles from each other.*  
.....

*If indoors, with night-lights, and particularly if children are present, consider the following format:*

**SOUTH** (*lighting Mabon's candle*): A flame is lit in the depths of our souls.

**NORTH:** The new fire is with us in this circle of light. I proclaim the rebirth of the Sun, the Mabon, the youngest one, who from the womb of the Great Mother is born in silence and weakness as the smallest of lights, in this the midnight of the year.

**MABON:** I come to this place as a child of future generations. My gift is the gentle flame of hope that each new life brings into this world. I, and those who follow me, ask that those of you who gave us life protect this sacred flame. You who are the earthly guardians of wisdom unite together in peace and harmony to protect this planet, our home. This I ask for the children of the world.

*(Mabon walks around the circle lighting each candle from his/her own flame)*

**NORTH:** See how from the one source of all Life, Light and Love, our own tiny flames have been kindled. Feel the strength of those flames united. Within our daily lives, let us unite our thoughts and our actions with all those who work for peace in this world - with all those who work to build a safer Earth for the generations to come.

.....  
.....

**DRUID 2:** As the light is reborn, let us sing to the returning sun the Sacred word. May our voices be heard in the heavens.

**ALL:** Cascading Awens

**MISTLETOE BEARER and OAK BEARER** move to centre. (*If these plants are unobtainable, study the following to understand what they are meant to represent, and find or make whatever symbol seems best to embody these ideas, and adapt the words accordingly.*)

**OAK BEARER:** At this nadir of the year, at the centre of this sacred circle, I hail the King of the Trees. (*Uplifts Oak bough*) I praise the glory of the Oak, the lover of the lightning, the symbol of the eternal and the infinite.

**MISTLETOE BEARER:** At this time of greatest dark, (*Uplifting bough*) I raise this All-heal that was born between heaven and earth. May the spirits of the moment and eternity be one. (*Mistletoe is placed within the Oak bough.*)

**DRUID 1** (*cutting mistletoe with sickle*): With golden blade of crescent moon the Goddess takes the seed of life from the God. In every death is the seed of birth, and in the darkness of the longest night we await the dawning of the waxing year. Take in token the seed of the Golden Bough, sown on the Oak of Eternity. Let the youngest in our circle, our seed and our hope for the future, bear this bright blessing among us. May the Son of Light be reborn for ever.

*The youngest participant/s distribute sprigs of mistletoe and oak to all.*

**DRUID 2:** May the power of this moment inspire us, here at the rebirth of the light. May our lives and our hearts be filled with joy.

## THE CLOSING

**DRUID 2:** It is the hour of recall. As the fire/light dies down let it be relit in our hearts. May our memories hold what the eye and ear have gained.

*All hold hands.*

**ALL:** (*3 times, pausing between each*)  
We swear, by peace and love to stand,  
Heart to heart and hand in hand.  
Mark, O spirit, and hear us now,  
Confirming this, our sacred vow.

*All Chant CASCADING AWENS.*

**DRUID 1:** May the spirits of the Four Directions be thanked for their blessings.

**NORTH:** In the name of the great bear of the starry heavens and of the element of earth, we thank the powers of the North.

**WEST:** In the name of the salmon of wisdom and the element of water we thank the powers of the West.

**SOUTH:** In the name of the great stag and of the element of fire, we thank the powers of the South.

**EAST:** In the name of the hawk of dawn and of the element air, we thank the powers of the East.

*All Turn to face the centre again.*

**ALL:** May the harmony of the land be complete.

*Circle is uncast counter-sunwise.*

**DRUID 1:** May the blessings of the Goddess/God/Spirit/Great Spirit be always with us. I declare this ceremony of Alban Arthan is closed in the apparent world. May its inspiration continue within our beings.



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